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SCAG PUSHES FOR STRICTER ENVIRONMENTAL REQUIREMENTS ON BORDER POWER PLANTS

Power Plants On US/Mexico Border Expected To Impact Air Quality In Imperial County

LOS ANGELES, CA. – To protect and insure minimum negative impacts on the environment, the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) adopted on June 6 a resolution urging the United States and Mexican federal, state and local governments to create common environmental standards and compliance controls for the U.S./Mexico Border Corridor.

The issue was brought to SCAG's attention through the construction of new power plants on the Mexican side of the border by Sempra Energy and InterGen. These plants are not required to meet U.S. federal or state air quality standards, which are more rigorous than Mexico's standards. The two facilities are expected to emit more than 3,000 tons per year of Nitrogen Oxides (NOx). Concerns have also been raised about the plants' potential impact on the Salton Sea by drawing water from the New River, a major source of fresh water to the Salton Sea.

The required air quality standards and control measures for emissions from power plants in the U.S. and Mexico can significantly impact the communities along the U.S./Mexico border corridor, particularly in Imperial County. Currently, the area has the highest asthma rate of any region in California and exceeds the National Ambient Air Quality Standard (NAAQS).

Both power plant projects have been opposed by Congressman Dan Filner (D-San Diego), and Congressman Duncan Hunter (R-El Cajon) has also protested the limited environmental assessment conducted by the U.S. Department of Energy. Opposition to the projects has focused on construction of transmission lines and natural gas pipelines that would cross the border since the United States cannot legally provide input on Mexico's construction permitting process.

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Imperial County Supervisor Hank Kuiper requested that SCAG's Energy and Environment Committee (EEC) and its Regional Council (RC) support sub-regional efforts to mitigate the potential adverse air and water quality impacts resulting from construction and operation of power plants south of the U.S./Mexican border.

The resolution adopted by SCAG opposes construction of the current power plants until California Best Available Control Technologies (BACT) are installed and maintained on all power plants along the U.S./Mexico Border Corridor. The Sempra facility will install California BACT. In addition, the resolution calls for emission offsets to be obtained that meet California air quality standards and protect public health and welfare in the nearby communities.

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